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Woman wins compensation for discrimination on disability awareness course

A disabled woman who suffered discrimination on a disability awareness course run by Liverpool City Council has won £2,000 for injury to feelings on the day her case was due to go to court.

Rosemary Walker, a mother of two who lives in Lancashire, was supported in her legal case by the Disability Rights Commission (DRC).

In 2003, Ms Walker - who was a youth worker for Merseyside Youth Association - attended a two day training course run by Liverpool City Council. On the first day of the course, Rosemary, who uses a colostomy bag, was forced to tell fellow delegates about her condition when she discovered she couldn't change her colostomy bag in a nearby toilet because there was no sanitary disposal box. She was then obliged to search the building for a sanitary disposal unit, but none was found. Eventually, a course delegate who worked for a local charity organised a disposal box to be brought to the building.

Ms Walker felt she was subjected to humiliating treatment because of her disability and asked the Council to acknowledge they'd treated her unfairly. The case - taken under Part 3 of the Disability Discrimination Act - was due for a three day hearing in Liverpool County Court today.

On the morning of the court case however, the Council agreed to an out of court settlement. Liverpool City Council consented to a judgement to pay Ms Walker £2,000 damages for injury to feelings.

Bert Massie, Chairman of the DRC said the settlement provided a strong reminder that the rights of disabled people go beyond just physical access to buildings - and include ensuring people with long term health conditions can participate equally in services and training. .

"It's worrying that Rosemary suffered such humiliation. Not providing such a basic facility as a sanitary bin and a clean toilet is quite unacceptable in this day and age.

"I would expect local Councils to be standard bearers on disability equality, so it's disappointing to hear of such unfair treatment. I'm delighted the Council have now agreed to compensate Ms Walker and hope such an incident will never be repeated. But it is a pity they failed to do so before the day on which the case was to be heard."

Ms Walker said she was delighted with the resolution:

"I am pleased that the case has settled in my favour and I hope that Liverpool City Council will now make the necessary changes so that this doesn't happen to anyone in the future.

"It was the loss of dignity and not being treated with respect that made me so angry. I am talking about basic facilities which should be in place for anybody with my condition. It's not as if I needed anything special. This is a fundamental auxiliary aid and there is no excuse that it was not available on an accessible environments course"